

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 HA-05 EB-08
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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL MUNICH
USMISSION USNATO
AXMBASSY PRAGUE 1983
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
USICA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CSCE, PINS, BU
SUBJECT: BULGARIA RESUMES PUBLIC SALE OF WESTERN NEWSPAPERS

REF: SOFIA 0444 (NOTAL)

1. AS EMBASSY EARLIER REPORTED (REFTEL), EARLY THIS YEAR
WESTERN NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPERS CEASED TO BE AVAILABLE FOR
PUBLIC SALE. SINCE ABOUT APRIL 1977, LIMITED QUANTITIES
OF SEVERAL WESTERN NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPERS HAD BEEN ON
PUBLIC SALE AT A FEW HOTELS AND KIOSKS IN SOFIA AND AT BLACK
SEA RESORTS. SUCH LIMITED AVAILABILITY HAS RESUMED SINCE JULY 1978.

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2. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS BEGINNING IN APRIL 1978, THE
AMBASSADOR HAS RAISED THIS MATTER WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY
(SEE OFIA 0640 (NOTAL). RESPONSIBLE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS
CONFIDENTIALLY ADVISED THAT THE SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR WESTERN
NEWSPAPERS HAD BEEN CUT OFF BY AN UNCLEARED UNILATERAL DECISION
OF THE IMPORTING BULGARIAN AGENCY (HEMUS) IN ORDER TO
SAVE THE HARD CURRENCY INVOLVED (REPORTEDLY \$100,000 A

YEAR). IN LATE JUNE AND EARLY JULY, THESE OFFICIALS--
INCLUDING THE FOREIGN MINISTER MLADENOV--TOLD THE AMBASSADOR
HEY EXPECTED THE EARLIER SITUATION TO BE RESTORED SOON.

3. THE AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED TO OTHER WESTERN CHIEFS OF
MISSION THAT THEY MIGHT ALSO MAKE REPRESENTATIONS ON THIS
MATTER, BUT TO OUR KNOWLEDGE THE ONLY ONE TO DO SO AT AN
AMBASSADORIAL LEVEL WAS THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR, TO THE
CHIEF OF THE PRESS OFFICE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. ONE OR
TWO OTHER EMBASSIES DID RAISE THE MATTER IN LOWER LEVEL
REPRESENTATIONSTO THE PRESS OFFICE.

4. AN MFA PRESS AND INFORMATION DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL
RECENTLY TOLD THE EMBASSY PRESS AND CULTURAL OFFICER THAT
THE MATTER HAD GONE TO THE STATE COUNCIL, WHICH HAD TAKEN
THE DECISION TO PROMOTE DISTRIBUTION OF WESTERN NEWSPAPERS
AND HAD CHARGED BALKANTOURIST WITH MAKING PAPERS AVAILABLE
AT HOTELS AND OTHER POINTS. HE COMMENTED THAT THE PREVIOUS
ATTEMPT TO HAVE THE LOCAL PJSS DISTRIBUTION AGENCY (HEMUS)
HANDLE FOREIGN PAPERS HAD FAILED BECAUSE OF HARD CURRENCY
PROBLEMS, AND NOTED THAT SUPPLYING WESTERN PAPERS IS A
MONEY LOSER FOR BULGARIA SINCE IN ORDER TO RECOVER THEIR
HARD CURRENCY COST, THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD-TRIBUNE,
FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD HAVE TO SELL FOR 3-4 LEVA, WHICH WOULD
BE UNREASONABLE. (THIS IS AN INTERESTING INADVERTEMT
ADMISSION OF THE REWPEVA EXCHANGE RATE.) THIS MFA OFFI-
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CIAL STATED THAT DISTRIBUTION HENCEFORTH WILL BE REGULAR,
IF NOT EXTENSIVE.

5. AFTER INITIAL SIGHTINGS OF THE HERALD-TRIBUNE AND
LE MONDE IN JULY, THE EMBASSY RESUMED A MORE SYSTEMATIC
SURVEY. OUR MONITORING HAS NOW TURNED UP COPIES OF THE
INTERNATIONAL HERALD-TRIBUNE, LONDON TIMES, LE MONDE,
LA STAMPA, AND SUEDEDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG, ON A SCORE OF OCCASIONS
DURING THE PAST TWO MONTHS IN SOFIA HOTELS AND KIOSKS,
AND SEVERAL IN THE VARNA AREA. THERE IS NO OBSERVABLE
PATTERN OF AVAILABILITY, WITH PUBLICATIONS OBSERVED SPORAD-
ICALLY AT DIFFERENT LOCATIONS. MOST CONSISTENT HAVE BEEN
THE HOTEL SOFIA AND A DOWNTOWN SOFIA KIOSK. SOMETIMES
NEWSPAPERS ARE ON OPEN DISPLAY, PARTICULARLY IN HOTELS.
WE DETECT A RELUCTANCE ON THE PART OF SOME VENDORS TO MAKE
SALES ANDEVASIVENESS IN ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT AVAIL-
ABILITY. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE THE NUMBERS AVAILABLE,
OR LIMITATIONS ON DISTRIBUTION, EXCEPT THAT MOST--ALTHOUGH
NOT ALL--ARE FOUND AT HOTELS FREQUENTED BY WESTERN VISITORS.
WE HAVE ONLY LIMITED INFORMATION ON AVAILABILITY OUTSIDE
OF SOFIA, BUT THERE IS PROBABLY VERY LITTLE DISTRIBUTION
EXCEPT AT TIMES IN RESORT AREAS FREQUENTED BY WESTERNERS.

HOWEVJ DURING THE RECENT INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR AT
PLOVDIV--BULGARIA'S SECOND LARGEST CITY--NO NON-COMMUNIST
WESTERN NEWSPAPERS WERE SEEN BY EMBASSY OFFICERS DURING
THE SEVEN-DAY EVENT.

6. WESTERN NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO BEEN
SIGHTED AT A FEW MAJOR REFERENCE LIBRARIES OPEN TO THE
PUBLIC. ON THE OTHER HAND, AT SUCH PLACES AS READING
ROOMS OF CITY HOUSES OF CULTURE, WHEN NEWSPAPERS OTHER
THAN BULGARIAN AND SOVIET ONES ARE AVAILABLE, THEY ARE
WESTERN AND EASTERN COMMUNIST PAPERS.

7. COMMENT: THE REPORTED CUTOFF OF WESTERN NON-COMMUNIST
NEWSPAPERS FOR REASONS OF HUSBANDING HARD CURRENCY IMPORTS
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MAY, IN FACT, BE TRUE. IN ANY EVENT, IT EVIDENTLY TOOK
A HIGH LEVEL DECISION TO RENEW IMPORT AND PUBLIC SALES.
THE FEW WESTERN NEWSPAPERS ON SALE ARE PRIMARILY AVAILABLE
FOR WESTERN VISITORS, BUT TO SOME EXTENT ALSO TO BULGARIANS.
GARTHOFF

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